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Program

2004-2005 Season

Friday, March 25, 8.00pm

Sunday, March 27, 8.00pm

NEC's Jordan Hall

Grant Llewellyn, conductor

Overture No. 1 in D Minor from *Admeto*

George Frideric Handel
(1685-1759)

"Là dove gli occhi" and "Gelosia spietata Aletto" from *Admeto*

Kendra Colton, soprano

Overture No. 2 in G Minor from *Admeto*

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"Lascia ch'io pianga" and "Augelletti che cantate" from *Rinaldo*

Kendra Colton, soprano

—INTERMISSION—

Concerto Grosso, Op. 3, No. 6

Vivace • Adagio • Allegro

"Torni omai" and "Fonti amiche" from *Tolomeo*

Kendra Colton, soprano

"Arrival of the Queen of Sheba" from *Solomon*

"Ev're sight these eyes behold" from *Solomon*

Kendra Colton, soprano

The program runs for approximately two hours.

The audience is respectfully asked to turn off all electronic watches, paging devices, and cellular phones during the performance.

The Handel and Haydn Society is funded in part by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, a state agency.

Program Notes

Handel and his Sopranos

George Frideric Handel's English career stretched over nearly fifty years, from his arrival as a young genius in 1710 to his death in 1759. In that time he created a string of masterpieces, first in opera and then in a new genre of English oratorio that he invented himself. All these works relied on one thing:

NOTES IN BRIEF

As a German writing Italian opera in England, George Frideric Handel personified the elegant cosmopolitan tastes of the early eighteenth century. Our program today gives a glimpse of Handel's work during three of his most fertile periods: his first arrival in England in 1710 as a confident 25-year-old, his years as director of the Royal Academy in the late 1720's, and finally his later career as an oratorio composer. During his nearly half a century of active duty in London, Handel managed to persuade some of the greatest stars of his day to travel to England and sing for his productions. Tonight you will hear the music he wrote for some of these divas. For his first English opera, *Rinaldo*, Handel brought over Isabella Girardeau to sing the role of Almirena; for his late oratorio *Solomon* he had the talents of Giulia Frasi for nearly all the women's parts. In between, during the glory years of the Academy, he had the luxury of writing arias for not one but two of the greatest singers of the century: Faustina Bordoni and Francesca Cuzzoni, whose professional rivalry ended in an ignominious battle onstage. These singers' artistry has disappeared without a trace, except that which they made on Handel's music; their remarkable talents live on in the arias he wrote for them.

sensational singers. Handel was perpetually embarking on recruiting trips to the Continent, persuading the leading divas of the day to make the lengthy journey to London and sing in his productions. Tonight we hear the music he wrote for several of these megastars, to showcase their particular artistry.

We begin our concert at the height of Handel's operatic career in London, with a few arias from his *Admeto*. This was first performed in January 1727, starring two sopranos whose rivalry was soon to hasten the demise of the Royal Academy of Music. Johann Quantz, the flute virtuoso, was in London at the time, and later reported that *Admeto* "had magnificent music. Faustina, Cuzzoni, and Senesino, all three virtuosos of the first rank, were the chief performers in it... but the violence of party for the two sopranos was so great that when the admirers of one began to applaud, those of the other were sure to hiss."

The role of Alcestis, virtuous wife of King Admetus, was written for one of Handel's great stars, the mezzo Faustina Bordoni. Handel was lucky to have both her and Francesca Cuzzoni on his team, but their personal and professional rivalry was intense. Faustina's fame rested not only on her brilliant passagework and fluent ornamentation, but on her vivid acting as well; she was universally regarded as one of the greatest singers of her generation. A few years



George Frideric Handel

later she married the composer Johann Adolph Hasse, and settled with him in Dresden.

Handel began his operatic career in England almost the minute he arrived there.

In *Admeto*, Faustina got to portray not only a woman who sacrifices her life for her husband, but also one who was passionately torn by jealousy. "La dov'è gli occhi" comes from Act III, where Alcestis, having gone to Hell and back for her husband, is told by Hercules that Admetus is in love with another woman. Its gentle *andante* is in sharp contrast to her earlier aria, "Gelosia" from Act II, where she has begun to suspect her husband of infidelity. Our set closes with the tremendous overture to Act II, as the curtain rises on the sight of Alcestis chained to a rock in Hell. This "horrid symphony" captures the mood with wild rushing scales, sudden *piano* interjections, and a fugue full of tortured intervals and descending chromatic scales.

Handel began his operatic career in England almost the minute he arrived there. He came in the fall of 1710, a few months after the sensational success of his *Agrippina* in Venice, and the local impresario Aaron Hill was determined to begin a new company with an especially spectacular

work. Handel was presented with a libretto based on Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, carefully designed to stun the English with a maximum of stage-business, and to keep their attention by trimming recitative to the bare minimum.

After writing at top speed, Handel finished *Rinaldo* in time for a premiere in late February, 1711. It did indeed make quite an impression: the *Spectator* reported that "The Opera of *Rinaldo* is filled with Thunder and Lightning, Illuminations, and Fireworks." The role of Almirena, Rinaldo's beloved, was taken by the young Isabella Girardeau, a soprano of whom little is known apart from her violent rivalry with her colleague Armida. (This seems to have been a constant in Handel's operatic career.) In Act III, Almirena is about to be killed by Armida; her plea for mercy, "Lascia ch'io pianga," has since become one of Handel's greatest hits. But like much of *Rinaldo*, Handel lifted this from his earlier work. The sarabande-like melody works particularly well with its most famous words, though: the suspended rhythm vividly convey the "sospiri" of the captive, while the sheer simplicity of the tune makes the heartfelt plea all the more moving.

Almirena's big solo moment occurs in Act I, when she appears all by herself in a "giardino delizioso" filled with little birds. Her aria "Augelletti che cantate" opens with a lengthy ritornello for two recorders and solo viola, accompanying a sopranino recorder indulging in an outpouring of

virtuosic figuration, an elaborate translation of birdsong into the language of *opera seria*. The effect was apparently heightened by having live birds flying about the stage for this number; in the sidebar, you'll find Addison's account of this *coup du théâtre*.

Our second half opens with the last of Handel's six Concerti Grossi Op. 3, a collection that was published without Handel's permission in 1734. This concerto opens with a brilliant D Major movement, with concertante episodes for oboes reminiscent of the *Solomon* Sinfonia we will hear later in the program. This *vivace* first appeared in Handel's *Ottone* in 1723. It is followed by a delightful duet for flute and violin which appears in the original version of the concerto, before the sparkling final *Allegro*.

Tolomeo was Handel's last opera for the Royal Academy, and the last of the five operas he wrote featuring both Faustina and Cuzzoni. The role of Seleuce, Ptolomey's consort, was written for Francesca Cuzzoni, who had already stunned London with such roles as Cleopatra in *Giulio Cesare* and the title role in *Rodelinda*. One of her particular gifts, along with a fleet coloratura, was the shaping of slow, expressive arias. Here her aria from Act I, "Fonti amiche," is a beautifully

atmospheric work, accompanied by recorders. Her Act III aria, "Torni omai," borrows much of its melodic material from Telemann.

Handel only reluctantly made the move to English oratorio when it became clear that the English public would not continue to support Italian *opera seria*. Among his greatest achievements in these later years was the oratorio *Solomon*, which premiered in March 1749. By this time he had a new generation of singers, including the talented Giulia Frasi, who (according to Burney) had "a sweet and clear voice, and a smooth and chaste style of singing." As the Queen of Sheba, Frasi got some particularly delectable arias, including "Ev'ry sight these eyes behold," illustrating her amazement at Solomon's majestic Temple. Her entrance in the oratorio is heralded by the sinfonia known today as the "Arrival of the Queen of Sheba."

-Robert Mealy

Mr. Mealy is the Society's Christopher Hogwood Research Fellow for the 2004-2005 season. A scholar and performer, he has recorded and toured with many period instrument ensembles. Mr. Mealy frequently writes on music, and teaches historical performance at Harvard and Yale.

SPARROWS FOR THE OPERA

"As I was walking [in] the Streets about a Fortnight ago, I saw an ordinary Fellow carrying a Cage full of little Birds upon his Shoulder; and as I was wondering with my self what Use he would put them to, he was met very luckily by an Acquaintance, who had the same Curiosity. Upon his asking him what he had upon his Shoulder, he told him, that he had been buying Sparrows for the Opera. Sparrows for the Opera, says his Friend, licking his lips, what are they to be roasted? No, no, says the other, they are to enter towards the end of the first Act, and to fly about the Stage.

"This strange Dialogue awakened my Curiosity so far that I immediately bought the Opera, by which means I perceived the Sparrows were to act the part of Singing Birds in a delightful Grove: though, upon a nearer Enquiry I found [that] though they flew in Sight, the Musick proceeded from a Consort of Flagellets and Bird-calls which was planted behind the Scenes. But to return to the Sparrows; there have been so many Flights of them let loose in this Opera, that it is feared the House will never get rid of them; and that in other Plays, they may make their Entrance in very wrong and improper Scenes, so as to be seen flying in a Lady's Bed-Chamber, or perching upon a King's Throne; besides the Inconveniences which the Heads of the Audience may sometimes suffer from them." -Joseph Addison for The Spectator (1711)

Artist Profiles

Grant Llewellyn, conductor



Grant Llewellyn, one of a new generation of exciting conductors, is renowned all over the world for his exceptional charisma, energy and easy authority in music of all styles and periods. Now in his fourth season as Handel and Haydn Society Music Director, Llewellyn also is Music Director of the North Carolina Symphony Orchestra (Raleigh) and Conductor-in-Residence at the BBC National Chorus and Orchestra of

Wales, which he led last September to great acclaim at The Royal Albert Hall in London. Mr. Llewellyn has served as Assistant Conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Principal Guest Conductor of the Stavanger Symphony, and Principal Conductor of the Royal Flanders Philharmonic. In demand around the globe, recent guest appearances include Opera North in Leeds, the Utah Symphony Orchestra, the Southwest German Radio Orchestra (Stuttgart), the Kansas City Symphony, the Calgary Philharmonic, and subscription concerts with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. This season, Grant Llewellyn also conducts performances with the Helsinki and Turku (Finland) Philharmonics, and the Orchestre de Picardie (France).

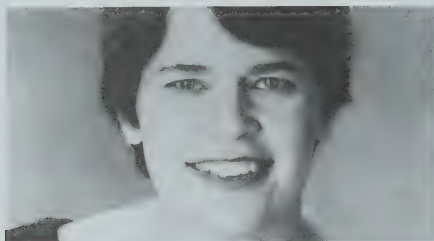
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Handel and Haydn Society

Celebrating its 190th anniversary season, the Handel and Haydn Society is a leader in historically informed performance, offering programs of music for chorus and orchestra from the Baroque and Classical eras. Under the leadership of Music Director Grant Llewellyn and Conductor Laureate Christopher Hogwood, each Handel and Haydn concert is distinguished by the use of instruments, techniques, and performance styles typical of the period in which it was composed. Recent seasons have highlighted a series of semi-staged operas and programs with dance, including Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610* and "Ballet Music from the French Court." The Society also has featured the

Boston debut of many rising stars, such as tenor Plácido Domingo and sopranos Dawn Upshaw and Sylvia McNair. Handel and Haydn may be heard nationally on NPR's prestigious *SymphonyCast* program and on numerous recordings, such as the Grammy Award-winning *Lamentations and Praises* and *PEACE*, which debuted last spring at number five on Billboard Magazine's Classical Chart. Now in its 20th year, the Educational Outreach Program gives over 10,000 public school students opportunities to hear and perform classical music and involves children in music-making in meaningful, enjoyable, and lasting ways.

Kendra Colton, soprano



Soprano Kendra Colton has been soloist with leading orchestras including the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Houston Symphony, and the National Symphony, under conductors including Harry Bicket, Bernard Haitink, Christopher Hogwood, Sir Neville Marriner, Nicholas McGegan, Seiji Ozawa, and Bruno Weil. In addition to Symphony appearances she performs

regularly with modern- and period-instrument orchestras such as the Handel and Haydn Society, Washington Bach Consort, and others. Ms. Colton's operatic engagements have included Mozart's *Il Re Pastore* for Boston Lyric Opera, Handel's *Tolomeo* at the International Handel Festival in Göttingen, Germany, and Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro* and the complete Monteverdi cycle for Skylight Opera. She also appeared in Lully's *Thésée* at the Boston Early Music Festival. Ms. Colton can be heard on two solo CDs and has also recorded the *St. John Passion* and Cantata BWV. 133 with Emmanuel Music where she performs regularly. She last appeared with the Handel and Haydn Society in April of 2002 in staged performances of Handel's *Ariodante* with Christopher Hogwood conducting.

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Program Texts

“Là dove gli occhi” from ADMETO

Là dove gli occhi io giro
 E l'erba e i fior rimiro
 Farsi più vaghi e belli,
 Perché il mio ben frà lor.
 Mosse le piante,
 Ogn'aura e dolce vento,
 A me porge contento,
 E il canto degli augelli
 Par, che a me dica ogn'or:
 Egli è costante.

*Wherever I turn my eyes
 I see the grass and the flowers
 grow more charming and lovely,
 because among them my love has trodden.
 Every breeze,
 and gentle gust of wind,
 brings me happiness,
 and the song of the birds
 seems to say to me:
 he is faithful.*

“Gelosia spietata Aletto” from ADMETO

Gelosia spietata Aletto,
 Meco uscisti dall'inferno,
 E m'entrasti a forza in petto
 Per affligger questo cor.
 Ti vorrei scacciar dal seno,
 Ma non ho vigore bastante;
 Chi prova il tuo veleno,
 Nò, non sa, che cosa è amor.

*Pitiless Alecto, jealous Fury,
 you escaped the inferno with me,
 and entered my breast by force
 to wound this heart.
 I wish I could tear you from my bosom,
 but I have not sufficient strength;
 who does not feel your poison
 does not know what love is.*

“Lascia ch'io pianga” from RINALDO

Lascia ch'io pianga
 Mia cruda sorte,
 E che sospiri
 La libertà.
 Il duolo infranga
 Queste ritorte,
 De' miei martiri
 Sol per pietà.

*Let me weep
 over my cruel fate
 and sigh
 for freedom.
 May my grief
 mercifully
 break these chains
 of anguish.*

“Augelletti, che cantate” from RINALDO

Augelletti, che cantate,
 Zefiretti che spirate
 Aure dolci intorno a me,
 Il mio ben dite dov'è!

*Little birds, as you sing,
 gentle breezes, as softly
 you waft around me,
 tell me, where is my beloved?*

"Torni omai" from TOLOMEO

Torni omai la pace all'alma,
troppo già sofferesi, oh Amor!
Or la speme in dolce calma,
mostra goiije a questo cor.

*Peace at last can return to my soul,
Ah, God of Love, it has suffered so much!
Now hope reigns serenely
in this breast.*

"Fonti amiche" from TOLOMEO

Fonti amiche, aure leggere,
mormorando, sussurrando,
voi mi dite che godrò.
Io godrò, fonti, ma quando, aure,
quando?
Ah, voi dite lusinghiere
Che lo sposo rivedrò!

*Friendly fountains, sweet breezes,
murmuring, whispering,
tell me I'll once again know bliss.
I shall rejoice, but, fountains, when?
When, breezes?
You give me hope
that I'll find my husband!*

"Ev'ry sight these eyes behold" from SOLOMON

Ev'ry sight these eyes behold
Does a different charm unfold;
Flashing gems and sculptur'd gold,
Still attract my ravish'd sight.

*But to hear fair truth distilling,
In expressions choice and thrilling,
From that tongue so soft and killing,
That my soul does most delight.*

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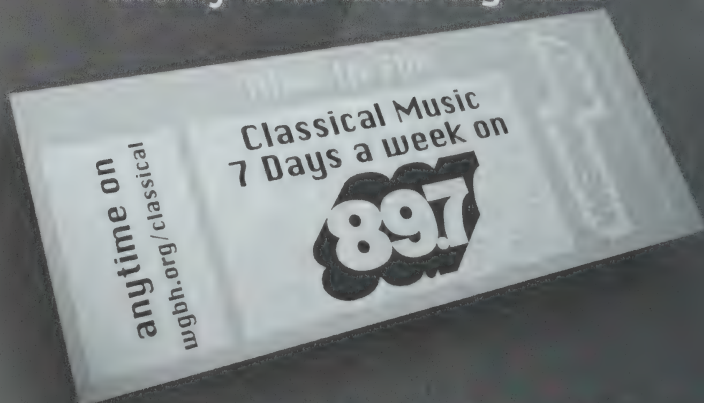
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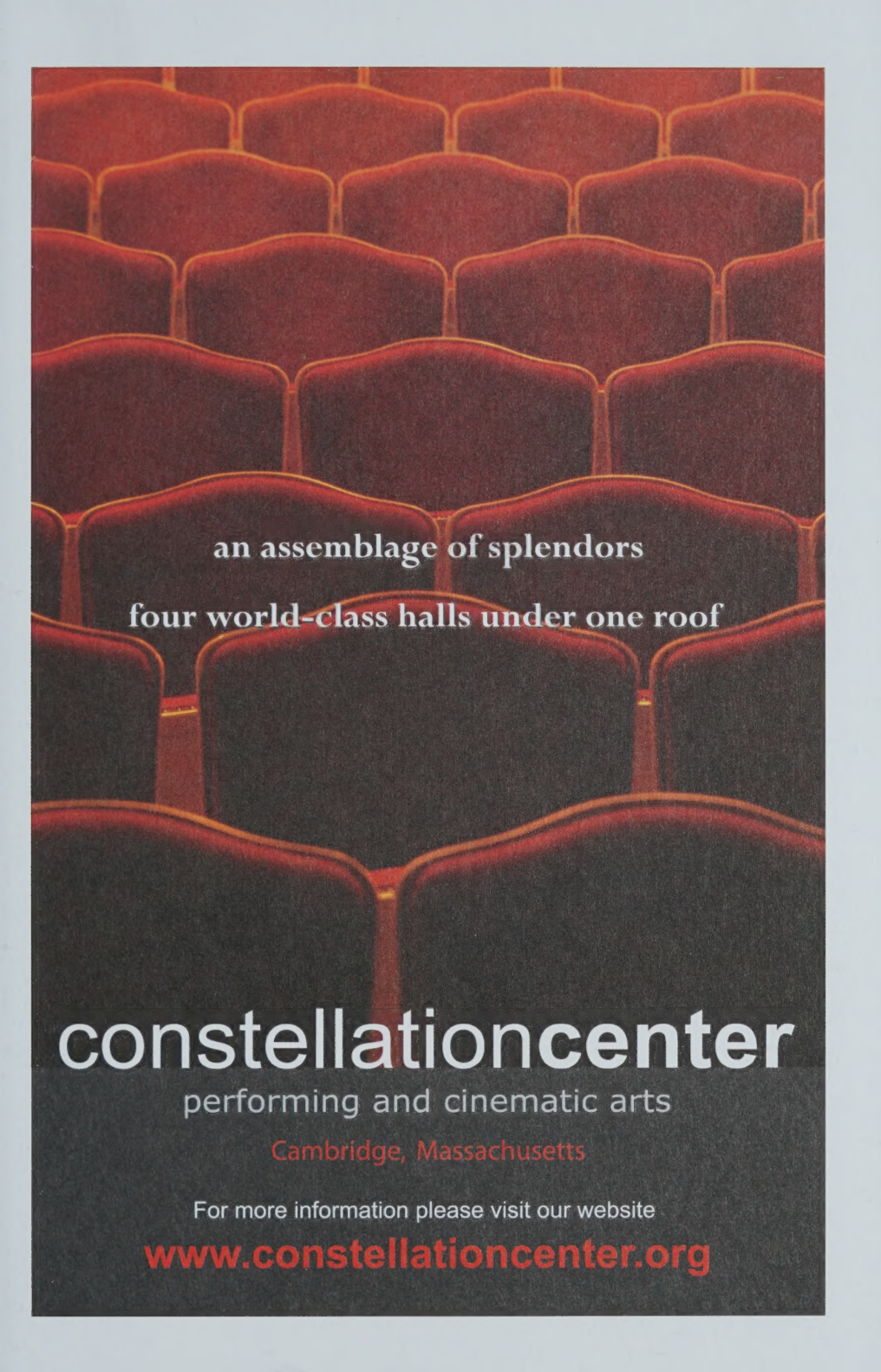
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